

## 18th Century Events and the Life of Adonijah Bidwell

There were two major historical events in the first half of the 18th century which had a lasting influence on Adonijah Bidwell's early life; the first was a series of world wars between the French and the English which started in Europe and had their counterparts in America, especially Queen Anne's War from 1702 to 1713 and King George's War from 1744 to 1748. The second historical event was the Great Awakening which flowered in New England in the 1730's and 1740's.

Adonijah Bidwell grew up on stories of the Deerfield Raid of 1704 and also the French and Indian raids on Saco, Reading, Sudbury and Haverhill. These communities-not so far from Hartford where he was born in 1716 bore the brunt of barbarous French and Indian attacks in Queen Anne's War. New England youngsters shuddered to hear the story of the Deerfield Massacre when in 1704 a force of 50 French soldiers and 200 Indians easily entered the snow-drifted staked fort and quickly overcame the sleeping inhabitants, killing 50 and taking 111 prisoners on a harrowing journey to Canada. They read the story of prisoner Eunice Mather Williams, the wife of Pastor John Williams, who published a descriptive narrative of her ordeal called *The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion*. Perhaps the most shocking part of the event concerned those captives who would not return even after lengthy negotiations because they preferred to live the Indian way of life.

The signing of the Treaty of Utrecht ended that war in 1713. It granted the French North American territories of Acadia (Nova Scotia), Hudson Bay and Newfoundland to England, while the French maintained control of Cape Breton Island and islands in the St. Lawrence River. Unfortunately, ambiguous delineations of Acadian territory led to continuing hostilities between the French and English.

When young Adonijah was eight years old, a bloody massacre in Maine (which was an extension of Massachusetts Bay Colony) was conducted by a French Jesuit missionary and his Abenaki allies. Subsequently, New Englanders destroyed Norridgewock on the Kennebec, the center of the French mission to the Abenaki. The English Colonies of New England erected a chain of northern forts to protect themselves from French expansion and from Indian incursions. A group of Massachusetts colonists moved to Fort Drummer at the site of present day Brattleboro, VT to help protect the Massachusetts frontier. In 1725, Indian fighter Captain John Lovewell led an attack against Indians in Wakefield, NH. They took ten Indian scalps in the first recorded instance of scalping by colonists. In Boston, Indian scalps brought a hefty bounty of 100 pounds each. Throughout New England incursions continued and those appointed to "night watch" took it seriously.

By the time Adonijah Bidwell was 20 years old, he heard about the Congregational clergyman, Jonathan Edwards who in 1734 was preaching a series of stirring sermons initiating the Great Awakening in the New England colonies. This religious revival swept the American colonies. If a bright young man was looking for a lifetime profession and heard Jonathan Edwards' sermons or read them in pamphlet form, it might have been the determining factor in embracing a lifetime ministerial role. Bidwell entered Yale College and pursued studies in divinity. In Boston, Edwards published an account of the Great Awakening called *Surprising Conversions* while

Bidwell continued his studies under the tutelage of Reverend Benjamin Colton of West Hartford (Yale 1710). Adonijah Bidwell taught school in West Hartford and Hartford but he looked forward to preaching the Gospel.

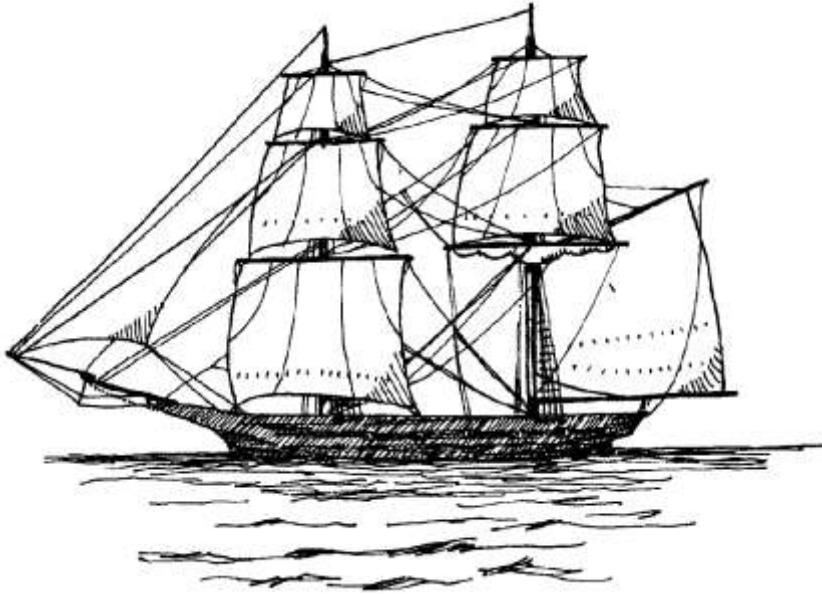
Both of these historic influences, the rivalry between the French and English and the Great Awakening were overarching events in the life of Adonijah Bidwell in the decade of the 1740's. A few months before his graduation from Yale in 1740, Frederick 11 of Prussia invaded Silesia after the death of Emperor Charles VI. This event in Europe disrupted the balance of power on the continent and resulted in an alliance of the French and Spanish against England leading to the War of the Austrian Succession. As with all European Wars, the war was waged in the colonial territories and here it was called King George's War since George 11 held the crown in England. King George's War began on the 15th of March 1744 just as Adonijah Bidwell was preparing for his ordination as a Congregational (Puritan) minister in October of the same year. Hostilities escalated. Bidwell answered the call of both his patriotism as a loyal subject of the English Crown and his ministerial calling and became a Chaplain for the Connecticut Fleet preparing for an expedition to Canada in response to the unsuccessful but provoking French attack on the British Garrison at Port Royal in Nova Scotia.

When the French lost Acadia, France settled Louisburg on Cape Breton Island and constructed a mighty fortress and naval station to dominate the North Atlantic. To the Protestant colonists in New England, Louisburg was the seat of Popery, privateers and pirates, threatened Nova Scotia and preyed on New England commerce, fishing and peace of mind. The fortress was deemed impregnable by the French and cost millions of dollars to fortify; however, because war had not openly been waged from 1713 to 1744, France had neglected it.

In 1744, New Englanders led by Governor William Shirley of Massachusetts believed that the time was right for an attack on Louisburg. The General Court responded and called up 3,000 men and paid for their provisions. Shirley was not fully assured of English help and he hoped to capture the fort before the French fleet arrived in the spring. On March 24 about 4300 men sailed from Boston under the command of William Pepperell.

On April 14, 1745 Reverend Adonijah Bidwell began his tour of duty as Chaplain on the Sloop of War "The Colony" in the expedition to Cape Breton Island to capture the Louisburg fortifications. He kept a diary from that day to January 11th, 1746 and was an eye witness to the events that unfolded. The diary was first printed in the New England Historical and Genealogical Register; later, a transcription of the original was made by Elliot M. Bidwell of Providence, Rhode Island, a descendant of Adonijah Bidwell and author of a biographical sketch of Bidwell as a member of the Yale Class of 1740.

Adonijah Bidwell's account began on Sunday, April 14th when the Connecticut Fleet sailed out of New London at 11 am. The fleet consisted of seven transports with a convoy of sloops from Connecticut and Rhode Island. By the 17th, they anchored at Nantucket and tried to hoist their sails but the winds were against them and they had to wait a day. Fair winds speedily brought them to the Bay of Fundy by the 21st of April, a Sunday, and Bidwell preached his first sermon on board the sloop, "Charming Molly" on Luke, Ch. 2, vs. 10. He noted they were 75 leagues from Cape Cod, anchored near Cape Sables and high winds had scattered the fleet that night.



*British Brig Sloop-of-War, 1830*

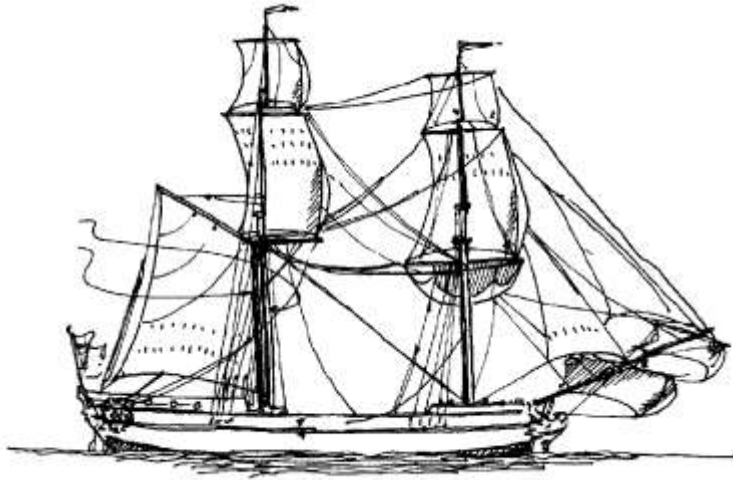
By the 24th, the fleet gathered at Canso; all were accounted for except the Rhode Island sloop called “The Colony” which had been chased the day before by a 30 gun French ship. Bidwell thought the Rhode Island sloop was captured. They were only 20 leagues from Cape Breton, their destination. On the 25th, the Rhode Island sloop joined them and at 1 pm, the fleet fired five guns to welcome the lost sloop. There were 100 sails in the Connecticut Fleet as it weighed anchor at Canso. They were cheered upon their arrival by Pepperell especially because Commodore Peter Warren, commander of this back up fleet had ships with a 60, 50 and two 40 guns; in fact there were three English warships with him. Eight other English ships would arrive later. On the 26th of April, Bidwell was again preaching on board from Timothy, Ch. 1, vs.15. That afternoon they were on “Burying Island” and another minister preached from I Kings 20, 11. Bidwell noted that it was very unbecoming when preparing for a battle to behave themselves as if they already had a victory.

The French at Louisburg were sounding alarms in the early morning of the 30th of April and a company of soldiers tried to prevent the English from landing but the sloops continued to land men under fire of cannons from the impregnable fortress. The small contingent of French on shore retreated but “Ye English pursued and hunted them down as dogs hunt foxes in ye woods,” wrote Bidwell. A fort and small town near the fortress were burned to ashes. The main fortress of Louisburg continued to be held by the French garrisoned there.

On May 1st, the English erected a standard and hoisted two English flags over the small town nearby. The English were fortunate in capturing the French Royal battery of 30 cannon which they turned against the fortress. The French began to sling bombs against the Royal Battery and a French fleet arrived to try to re-take the Royal Battery but they were repulsed by the British. Skirmishes continued as Bidwell's sloop joined a Man of War with three captains and a schooner at St. Ann's Bay which, although it was May, was covered with snow. In the afternoon, several men went on shore and raided a

settlement. They ransacked the town, burned down 20 homes, and took one prisoner and absconded with feather beds, cases of bottles, chests of cloth, iron pots, brass kettles, candlesticks, frying pans and pewter plates and spoons. Bidwell is careful to account for all this booty and did not criticize the taking of spoils of war.

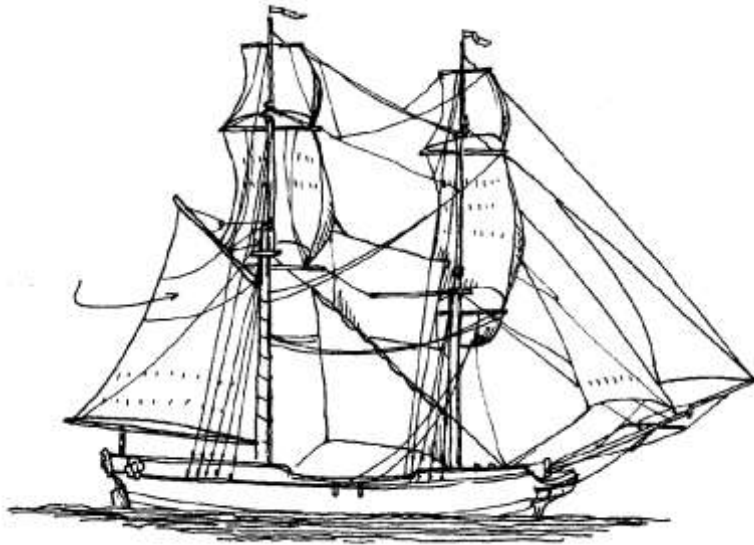
His unit continued to sail close to land; two boys went ashore at Aganish Bay and burned down a town of 80 homes. They set sail to return to Louisburg in the cold rain and snow. When they returned, they heard about other towns burned down by the English and that 17 English had been killed by Indians on Cape Breton. Bidwell identified an English Snow in the harbor of Louisburg which was similar to a Brig but bigger and carried an extra mast.



*Snow, 1770*

By mid May, the English hoisted an English flag at the light house and erected a Fascine Battery there and another on the northwest part of the town. Firing continued day and night with several wounded or killed on both sides. When a French Brig was spotted in Scatere Bay, she was pursued and the English “Mermaid” a Man of War, engaged the French Man of War with 64 guns. This ship was taken by Commodore Warren who lost four men. The French had 500 men on board, 30 were killed and 30 wounded.

A few days later Bidwell noted his sloop anchored in Caperoos Bay “to wood and water”; seven were killed out of 13 and three were scalped. Meanwhile an accidental fire near two barrels of powder killed two men. An English whale boat took 12 French. A doctor of the fleet dug up corpses of English and burned them. The English marched 400 prisoners to a deserted French fort where they were held. By the end of the month, the colonials were still in the harbor off Louisburg and “The Hector”, a Man of War with 40 guns joined the fleet. A force of 150 English were killed and drowned in a storm off the Island Battery while “The Mermaid” was skirmishing off the coast and intercepted a French Brigantine from Nantes bound for Louisburg.



*Brigantine, 1770*

More captures of French ships were recorded by Bidwell in the first week of June. On the 6th, a French Man of War deserted and asked to speak to General Pepperell. The informant said that 40 to 50 men had been killed within the walls of the city since the siege and 3,600 men, women and children were left in the city with enough bread but no meat. Two “Lurtzers” deserted and crossed over to the English Army. On June 8th, a Flag of Truce went into the city of Louisburg the same day a 50 gun ship Man of War joined the Fleet while Captain Gaton's fleet took 700 French prisoners and set sail for Boston. Plundering continued. Bidwell wrote: “Killed one Frenchman accidentally.” It is unclear if he was recording an event for which he was responsible.

The siege lasted six weeks and ended on June 15th when the colonials forced Louisburg on Cape Breton to capitulate. It was a major victor because Louisburg guarded the approach to the St. Lawrence and to the interior of French holdings in Quebec and beyond. On that day, Bidwell wrote, “A French flag of truce came out to Gen. Pepperel (and ye) Commodore being with ye General at ye same time.” On Sunday the 16th, the flag of truce “came on board ye Commodore and on the Island Battery (which) surrendered the next morning with the whole fleet sailing into Lewisburg harbor. The lighthouse and the other Facine Batteries saluted the Commodore as he sailed in and when it was anchored fired 17 guns. The French Flags in the city cane down and the French were marched out. Then the English army marched in with drums beating, colors flying and the marines landed.”

Later French ships arriving from France were intercepted and celebratory guns were fired by the English victors. The fleet continued to stay in the harbor to retain their prize. On July 18th, Bidwell noted that 30 men on the sloop “Defense” were sick; he recorded deaths and burials. On July 31st, Rev. Mr. Williams preached from John, 20, 21 and Bidwell wrote, “The great intention of ye Gospel is to bring men to believe in Christ and so to Salvation.”

A 400 ton French ship from Bengal arrived the next day; they had been on the seas for four months and had departed from France 18 months earlier. They knew nothing of the war. With 60 men on board and 200,000 pounds of sterling with 30 to 36

guns, it was a great prize and easily captured. Meanwhile French ships with passengers were allowed to sail for France.

This victory was primarily achieved by colonial troops and it was the first important English victory in America. Reverend Bidwell's diary did not end with the victory, however; he continued in the next two months to record the names of colonials who were dead and buried in the "Burying Island." There were so many men sick on the sloop "Defense" that Captain Talcott set sail with them to New London. Bidwell and other ministers continued to preach to the troops; one sermon was on Luke Ch. 8, vs.18 and one on Deuteronomy. Bidwell noted after that sermon, "The truest wisdom is to consider and improve ye advantages of ye present life in order to a better." He was writing his life's philosophy.

On the 21st of August at 6 pm, the Grand Battery fired 19 guns in salutation of a special guest at the scene of the victory. Governor Shirley, Governor of Massachusetts arrived; the next day another 19 gun salute was fired as he entered the stronghold, the impregnable Louisburg Fort. On September 8th, Bidwell was asked to preach at the Grand Battery; he chose Timothy Ch.1, vs. 15 and in the afternoon he preached on Matthew Ch. 16, vs. 26. As the days reached the first week of September, he said it was unseasonably hot; each morning he recorded the newly dead. On Sunday the 15th of September, Rev. Mr. Williams preached from Numbers 14, 17. Bidwell was moved and wrote, "There is an infinite sufficiency in ye pardoning grace of God." On the 24th, Captain Rouse arrived in a "Snow" from England with "ye News ye General Pepperel was Knighted and also Commodore Warren was Knighted and made Gouverneur of Louisburg and Rere Admiral of the Blue."

On Sunday the 29th of September, Reverend Adonijah Bidwell's sloop set sail for New England. He preached on board from Colossians 3, 4 and was "seized with sickness the same day." On October 6th, he arrived in Boston but he recorded it later because he was "bereaved of my senses thro the violence of my distemper." Two days later he was carried in a litter to Doctor Rands where he was ill for eleven weeks and four days. On December 28th, he was well enough to set out from Boston for Hartford and "got home to Hartford the eleventh day of January."

Reverend Bidwell's diary records in a list all the vessels in the Cape Breton Expedition, the number of guns and the number of men on board. He also recorded the prizes taken by Commodore Warren's fleet and the order of battle in entering Louisburg harbor.

When the colonists heard about the treaty provisions signed at Aix-la-Chapelle ending King George's War, they were embittered. The treaty, signed in 1748 and agreed to by the English gave Louisburg back to the French in exchange for Madras in India. As a gesture of good will, the English reimbursed the colonists in New England for their expenses in the capture of Louisburg; lives that were lost were beyond compensation but the money sent to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts rescued at least that colony from economic doldrums. *The nautical sketches in this article are from The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Ships, Boats, Vessels: And other Water-Borne Craft by Graham Black Burn.*